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ETHNIC GROUPS OF MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA

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HUMAN RELATIONS AREA FILES PRESS
New Haven

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NORTHERN UPLAND GROUPS

KHASIS[1]

Synonyms. *Cassia, Cossyah, Kasia, Kassia, Kassya, Kasya, Khasia, Khasiah, Khassi, Khassia, Khosia* 101

ORIENTATION. **Identification and location.** The term Khasi has often been applied to that entire 101 131 197 114 122

[1] This account of Khasi culture, contributed by Anna P. McCormack, is based on field work during 1956-58 in the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District. The author wishes to emphasize that her data are on the upland Khasis who inhabit the center of the District. She gratefully acknowledges support of the field work from the Department of Anthropology of the University of Chicago, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Inc., and the Ford Foundation, for one of its Foreign Area Training Fellowships.

group of matrilineal and Mon-Khmer-speaking people who claim as their ancestral homeland the present-day United Khasi–Jaintia Hills District (within approximately 90° 47′ and 92° 52′ E. and 25° 5′ and 26° 5′ N.). This group includes the Jaintias (also Pnar or Synteng) in the southeast, who differ from the Khasis primarily in their duolocal residence pattern and less virulent forms of sorcery. (The Hadem in eastern Jaintia are a Kuki people.) It also includes the Lyngngams (also spelled Lynngam) in the west, who practice migratory swidden agriculture and certain peculiar funerary rites, and are said by Ehrenfels (1955) to be culturally intermediate between Khasis and Garos. Finally, it includes Bhois, Wars, and upland Khasis, which terms are primarily territorial. Bhoi country is the north-central part of the District, and is culturally complicated by the presence of Mikirs, Lalungs, and Nepalis. War country spans the entire southern length of the District, so that Wars divide into Jaintia Wars and Khasi Wars; of these, the Khasi Wars have traditionally transmitted property to sons as well as to daughters. The upland center of the District is the country of the Khasis proper, those whose culture provides the most useful model for interpreting the variations found elsewhere. [For general reference on all categories of Khasi culture, cf. Costa 1936 and 1937; also Gurdon 1907, especially for data on regional variations.] **Geography.** The District is 5,554 square miles of hilly tableland, intricately dissected by numerous rivers, and marked by significant ecological variation over very short distances. The tablelands step gently downward north from Shillong Peak, which at 6,445 feet is the highest point in the District, and over about 55 miles ease into the Brahmaputra valley where this is some 250 feet above sea level. To the south, the land slopes more steeply downward for about 20 miles, and then drops abruptly, in cliff and steep-slope formations, to the Ganges sea-level delta that begins at its north with Sylhet. The annual southwest monsoons drop torrential rains around Cherrapunji and Mawsynram villages (for Cherrapunji, a record 805 inches in 1861), but then, reaching Shillong 33 miles to the northeast, provide only about 100 inches per year. Rainfall is again greater in Bhoi, which shares the Brahmaputra valley climate. Climate is temperate on the high Shillong plateau, where it seldom freezes and never snows. To the north, climate becomes subtropical, forest is jungly, and fauna abound. The climate to the south is also subtropical. [Cf. Hooker 1891: chap. XXIX.] **Linguistic affiliation.** Khasi is one of the major Mon-Khmer languages, related to Mon, Khmer, Semang-Sakai, Nicobarese, and Palaung-Wa. The major Khasi dialects are Khasi, Jaintia, and Lyngngam, to which Grierson adds War. Further minor variations occur from village to village. The Khasis had no script until 1842, when the roman alphabet was successfully applied to the Cherrapunji dialect of Khasi proper. [Cf. Rabel 1961; Grierson 1903-28: 2; Bareh 1962.]

101 131 197 101 184 162 563 591 954 241 764 114 [428] [113] 133 [131] 132 [113] 197 [212] [113]

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1903-28: 2; Bareh 1962.] **Demography.** According to the 1951 census of India, the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District contained 221,982 Khasis and 67,532 Syntengs, Pnars, and Jaintias (India [Republic] 1952: 57). These figures, together with those for Khasis enumerated in Cachar (4,005), Mikir and North Cachar Hills (467), Lakhimpur (287), Sibsagar (276), and Darrang (211) districts, and those for Syntengs enumerated in Mikir and North Cachar District (464), yield a total of 295,224 Khasis. **History and cultural relations.** Khasis believe that they had supernatural origin in Khasi Hills (see Gait 1926: 260 for historical evidence, and Rafy 1920: 8-9 for myth, but see also Costa 1958, 1960; Gurdon 1907: 10-11; and Chatterji 1953: 12). Khasi tradition also states that in early times they moved gradually from east to west, from Jaintia toward Khasi Hills, in the practice of swidden agriculture (Gatphoh 1947: 97-98). The salient fact of known Khasi history, which begins generally in the mid-sixteenth century A.D. when there already existed the present-day 25 native Khasi chiefdoms, is the distinctive line of development followed by the separate kingdom of Jaintia. To the north, Jaintia was successively tributary, in part or in whole, to the Kachari kingdom (ca. 1230 A.D.), the Koch kingdom (strongest ca. 1560 A.D.), and the Ahom kingdom (strongest ca. 1700 A.D.) (Shakespear 1914: Map I). To the south, about 1500 A.D., Jaintia extended its rule over a tract of Sylhet, which was populated by Hindus and Muslims, and saw its kings fall thereafter under Brahman influence. In the early 1800s, Jaintia became involved in the fratricidal strife then prevalent in the ruling family of Manipur. In 1835, after the Jaintia king ignored British warnings not to seize British subjects for human sacrifice, Jaintia was punished by the British annexation of the Jaintia parganas in Sylhet. The Jaintia king then voluntarily turned over to the British the hills area of his domain, so that the whole of Jaintia became part of British India and, in 1860, came to be taxed as such, although the Jaintias were otherwise allowed to maintain their traditional system of village government. • By contrast, the remaining Khasi states had few formal external relations until British times. Khasis raided and traded in both the Brahmaputra and Sylhet valleys, but were basically turned inward on their own hills, where warfare between villages and between the states was apparently common. Khasis came into indirect relation with the British in 1765, when Sylhet and its markets became part of British India. In the 1790s, stepped-up Khasi raids into Sylhet caused the British to throw up a deterring line of forts along the foothills. Later, it became necessary to place an embargo on Khasi products in the Sylhet markets. In 1827, the British penetrated into western Khasi Hills by negotiating with the Khasi chief of Nongkhlaw State to build a road through his territory, linking the recently annexed Brahmaputra valley with Calcutta. For three decades

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thereafter, the British negotiated treaties with all the Khasi states, the last treaty being signed in 1862. It was contracted that the chiefs would be subject to the authority of a resident political agent, whose duties would involve maintaining law and order, judging cases of heinous crimes, approving the popular selection of any new chief, and exercising control over certain categories of natural resources. Khasis were guaranteed noninterference in their customary way of life, and they were not then, nor are they now, taxed. Most Khasis, as opposed to Jaintias, were never an integral part of British India, but they did undergo social change as a result of British presence. To summarize Mills (n.d.): (1) The British introduced the potato, which the Khasis rapidly took up as a cash crop for marketing as far as Calcutta. The intensive specialization exhausted the soil and made for ever-poorer crops. (2) Christian missionaries made large numbers of converts, and there arose the difficult question of whether a Christian should inherit property that traditionally was earmarked for her performance of non-Christian religious rituals. (3) About 1864 the British transferred their headquarters from Cherrapunji to Shillong. When they made Shillong the capital of the entire state of Assam, non-Khasis flocked to it, land values soared, and the concept of private property became increasingly important. Khasis began to marry with members of other ethnic groups, which introduced confusion into traditional social patterns. These problems were exacerbated during World War II, when Shillong and its environs enjoyed enormous economic prosperity. One notable aftermath of this affluence has been the accelerated enrollments in schools and colleges. Hundreds of Khasis now have the B.A., M.A., and even the Ph.D. degree. • With the Independence of India in 1947, and under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India (which was drafted by a Khasi), the United Khasi–Jaintia Hills District became a Part B, or Autonomous, Tribal Area, to be governed by a District Council composed largely of Khasis and Jaintias, and responsible not to the Legislature of Assam, but to the Governor of Assam as agent of the President of India. The native-state system and the chiefs still exist, and the District Council finds it difficult to effect legislation which is neither offensive to regional custom nor a simple blueprint of ill-fitting all-India legislation. The major political schism at this time is between Jaintias, who are accustomed to centralized authority and taxation, and Khasis, who resist the notion of taxation to support the work of a central District Council. [Cf. Gait 1926; Aitchison 1931; Bhuyan 1949; Morris 1910.]

175 619 648 [726] [651] [177] 177 648 [244] [439] [134] [797] [428] [635] [633] [167] [563] [423] [973] 648 642 [651] [563] [113]

SETTLEMENT PATTERN AND HOUSING. **Settlement pattern.** Khasis live sedentarily in named, nucleated, and unplanned villages which are situated just below hill summits to avoid strong winds but still be defensible, and which usually include a de-

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potable water supply. Villages are about two to five miles apart, and have no boundary markers. In the past, villages contained semipublic buildings and grounds: the home of the village priest (also the home of a chief if he resided in that village), the village marketplace, and tree groves, cremation grounds, or other awesome spots that were believed to be inhabited by supernatural beings. Villages today may have also one or more Christian churches, government social welfare buildings, and schools. Formerly, villages were entered through a guarded gateway; this is no longer the case, and paths feed into villages from all directions. Often several villages are nucleated into one large unit, named and also described as a "village." These were once defense units, but were so uncohesive otherwise that institutionalized rivalry obtained among the component villages. Now, they have been integrated through the agency of all-village public services, especially schools. **Housing.** The traditional Khasi house is entered through a door at the rounded end of a U-shaped ground plan, and is about 20 feet at widest extent; it is about 30 feet deep, and is elliptical or hogback in profile. Its walls are of stone blocks cemented with mud. The roof of grass thatch, supported by a bamboo frame, overhangs the walls on their outside, down to about three feet above the ground. The house is divided into two parts: the front one-third is on the ground level, floored either with stone blocks or tamped earth, and is used for storage of occupational instruments and as a shelter for poultry. The rear two-thirds is raised four feet on piles of stone blocks to a platform of planks, and is partitioned into six rooms, comprising a kitchen, areas for storage of food and water, and sleeping quarters. Furniture is minimal, and the house is totally undecorated. There are no windows, and no smoke vents. A house generally has a companion shed, walled of wood and grass matting and thatched with grass. This serves as a pigsty, but it may be partitioned also to house cows, and it may have a loft for fuel storage. Compounds often contain garden plots, and are fenced around with stone or bamboo and mud. Nowadays, the traditional house has given way to Western-style bungalows of wood and tin, especially in and around Shillong. [Cf. Mukherjee et al. 1941.]

ECONOMY. The Khasi economy is a market economy based on agriculture, and most Khasis are primary producers, sellers, middlemen, and/or providers of services in connection with markets. Khasis are often multioccupational; they produce goods for partial subsistence, and also play some part in trade. **Agriculture.** On the Shillong plateau, the major field crops are potatoes, maize, millets, and dry rice, still produced mostly through swidden farming, with a two- to three-year period of fallow, but increasingly through continuous use of a single field with the aid of ma-

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more and chemical fertilizers. Both level land and hillsides are cultivated by the same hand techniques. 3 × 6-foot patches are fashioned with walkways between, soils are overturned within the patches and allowed to dry, the soils are burned slowly and the ashes spread over the soil, and finally the seed is sown, either broadcast or sunk with the aid of the typical Khasi hoe. The coldest part of the upland enjoys a two-crop year, and Khasis often double crop as well. Paddy has long been found in the lowlands, in parts of Jaintia and Bhoi, the only places where the plow is found. Nowadays paddy is more and more seen in the uplands, together with a simple terracing and irrigation technology. Many upland Khasis have house gardens in which they raise a wide variety of vegetables, including pumpkins, cabbage, radishes, sweet potatoes, eggplant, and many others. Important crops in Bhoi country are paddy rice, hot, cucurbitacea, cotton, bananas, and pineapples, in War, they are betel nut, pan leaf, oranges, and sugar cane. **Fishing and hunting.** Fishing is done by spearing streams, but also in a subsistence activity only in the southern foothills. Hunting was formerly by bow and arrow or by traps, including spring guns and pitfalls, but was always primarily a sport. [Cf. Stonequiller 1958.] **Gathering.** Khasis once gathered about 150 species of wild plants, most of them for food, but some for medicine. Thrifty villagers still gather food plants, but there is no real dependence on gathering. Medicinal plants continue to be very important. **Domestic animals.** Fowl, goats, pigs, and cattle are bred both for meat and sacrifice. Milk was formerly not utilized, but is now so popular that specialists keep herds of milch cows. Pigs are used as village scavengers, but some also receive prepared food. Cattle and goats forage freely in the fields during the winter, but are herded by a communally hired herdsboy during the agricultural season. Most households keep chickens, primarily for their eggs, and a few keep ducks. A few horses are also seen. Dogs are pariahs, except for hunting dogs. Cats are popular. **Food and stimulants.** The staple food of Khasis is boiled rice, together with the dried fish which is imported from Sylhet. Boiled beef, pork, and chicken are relished, but beyond the means of most. Meals are taken twice a day, in the morning and evening, although farmers also take a midday meal in the field, and others may take tea and cold sweet potatoes or rice bread. Certain foods are taboo to certain sibs. Stimulants are extremely common, especially betel nut, which is often accompanied by a bit of tobacco. Tobacco is also smoked as cigarettes and in hookah and other pipes. Every village has one or more household taverns where distilled rice whisky is cooked and sold by the glass and by the bottle. Imported opium had spread widely in the malarious Bhoi country, but controls instituted in the 1940's have been fairly successful. All stimulants were once taken by men, women, and

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children, but Christian influence has eradicated or driven underground the consumption by women and children. **Industrial arts.** The only industrial arts traditionally practiced in all households were a rudimentary carpentry and a simple utilitarian basketry. Other arts were few, and were practiced as village specialties: the washing and smelting of iron ore and the forging of hoes, daos, knives, swords, and cooking pots (upland Khasis); the spinning of cotton thread (Mynso village, Jaintia); the dyeing of cotton thread and the weaving of cloth (Jaintias, Bhois, Lyngngams, Wars); the spinning and weaving of Eri silk (Khyrwang and Nongtung villages, Bhoi and Jaintia); and the hand manufacture, without wheel, of painted earthenware pots (Larnai village, Jaintia). Ironworking and the production of cotton goods have nearly died out through the competition of machine-made goods. Carpentry has greatly improved. An innovation of major importance is the sewing and tailoring, on sewing machines, of ready-made garments for both sexes. [Cf. Darrah 1896; C., W. 1832.] **Trade.** Khasi villages normally contain a number of household shops operated by women. Every Khasi also lives within walking distance of several village markets that are held on successive days of the eight-day week. The limits of market intercourse for the members of any particular village can be roughly distinguished by their naming the days of their week, which are called after the active markets. The exception is the huge market at Shillong, much of which is active daily, and which serves as a magnet for Khasis from all over the hills. The traditional barter has given way to currency in all markets. The small ones contain at least some local farm produce, plus other essentials like betel nut, and the food and tea stalls which serve as centers of social intercourse. The big markets contain not only regional produce and manufactures but also products from distant parts of the hills, brought for sale by traveling middlemen. There is also substantial trade, from the hills to the valleys, in potatoes, pears, hides, lac, cotton, caoutchouc, the wood of the sal tree, Eri silk thread, limestone, coal, ivory, bay leaf, betel nut, pan leaves, bananas, sugar cane, oranges, til, turmeric, and chilies. From the plains to the hills, there is trade in dried fish, paddy rice, salt, cooking oil, kerosene, matches, tea, sugar, wheat flour, machine-made cloth, shoes, metal pots, crockery, porcelain objects, coral beads, silver, and gold. Markets are important not only as economic institutions but also as centers for recreation (including archery competitions), courtship, reaffirmation of kinship ties with distant relatives, and the dissemination of information of all kinds. [Cf. Stegmiller 1964a.] **Division of labor.** Men do the heavy work, such as clearing and burning the swidden fields, caring for cattle and goats and driving them to market, butchering and selling large cuts of beef and pork, carpentry and mining, and driving and laboring on motor vehicles. They also tailor men's

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clothing, operate the large Khasi business establishments in Shillong, and provide all civic and religious leadership. Women care for children and for the home, do the marketing, and sell dried fish, betel nut, lime, fruits, and rice breads or sweets. Other tasks can be performed by either sex. Land tenure. Land was formerly divided into sib land and public domain. Sib land was corporately held in perpetuity and was inalienable except by the unanimous consent of all members of the sib. The public domain was subject to usufructuary right by anyone who kept the land regularly under habitation or cultivation, with a lapse of no more than three years. Most villages grew up on public domain, and there reclaimed all land inhabited or under cultivation by a village member as village land. Forests were public, except for sacred groves possessed by villages or lineage groups, and everyone was free to gather branches for fuel. Wastelands and streams were also public. By now most public domain and village land, together with its forest cover, has been pre-empted as private property and is being rented and sold as such. Sib lands remain intact, unless the sibs agree to rent, lease, or sell. [Cf. Gantho 1956.]

KIN GROUPS. Descent. Descent is matrilineal, and the Khasi is a member exclusively of his own matrilineage from birth to death. Adoption, which is very rare, is only within the matrilineage. Kin groups. The maximal matrilineage is the sib, this is a named, widely dispersed, strictly exogamous, lineage group, which claims but cannot trace its origin from a single ancestress. Sibs used to meet as corporate groups from time to time. Some sibs are linked with others in large exogamous groups that are unnamed and are defined solely by exogamy. Such a group is composed of two or more sibs, the ancestresses of which are claimed to have been either real sisters or close friends who out of affection declared that themselves and their descendants would be as consanguineals. The origin and function of sib-linkage is now unknown, and today the members of a sib will often disagree on whether or not their sib is linked with another. • The minimal matrilineage is the local descent group, or ing. This is the largest kin group that normally collect at life crises. It is said that the ing formerly spanned six generations; today, it encompasses only four. If an ing grows to more than four generations in a single village, it segments. New houses are located at some distance from the old and the ing soon forgets exactly how to trace genealogical connection, except for which segment descended from a youngest sister. The term ing may also be applied to an extended family, an elementary family, and a house. The elementary family is the basic domestic unit in Khasi society. In any village there are likely to be one or two households which stand as sole local representatives of the lineage of the female household head. Such a household is known as an

ring from the time it consists of an elementary family until it grows to a local descent group four generations deep. (Cf. Chattopadhyay 1961.) The female village. The terms of address given below are also terms of reference except where otherwise indicated, and are uniform for male and female speakers. They were collected in an upland Khasi village near Shillong (cf. Chowdhry 1957) for some regional variants.

Fy	ai
My	mei
FyEBy	paaw
FyYBy	pathyrnuh
Fyb	iba
Fy youngest b	khadduh
MyEBy	mesaw
MyYBy	meriah
My youngest b	maddah
MyEBy	mesaw, kw
MyYBy	kah (rel. kw)
EBy	kah khynnah
Elder By	kong kah
YBy	kah dong
Youngest By	kah duh
EBy	dong
Elder B	kaf, kong
YBy	kaf nah, kaf ri
Youngest B	khaddah
MyEBy, MyEBy	paw ri, paw u kmai
FyEBy, FyEBy	paw ri, pamiller
MyEBy, MyEBy, FyEBy, FyEBy	kaiba

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY. Under, according to the traditional courting pattern, a group of young male relatives and friends made nightly visits to the house of some virgin girl in another village, approaching her through leaves while she and her parents appeared dumb, and staying the night to avoid the dark with home. Marriage was according to the wishes of the parents after negotiation by a go-between from the boy's side. Girls might be 15 and boys 17 years of age. Girls have now acquired free choice of movement through attending school, however. Premarital sexual play is common, and young people choose their own spouses when the girl is about 18 and the boy 21. The most common mode of marriage is elopement, for Christians and non-Christians alike, but some Christians marry in church, and some Khasis still marry according to the traditional ceremonies or some variation on it. There are no preferred or prescribed marriage types, and a there a bride price or dowry. Some Khasi[illegible] the ideal for all. Examples of these taboos are exogamous. Other prohibited marriage partners are real and classificatory Fyb and FyBs, FyBDs, FyMs, and FyMsDs. The MyBsW is also prohibited, but

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were that the Mafefe's but are the Pafefe's pa- 895
followed (1967: 2), but Cardoso says that the Mafefe's [114]
a eligible after the death of Mafe, and that Pafefe's
a eligible after the death of Pa (1967: 78). Nowadays [178]
both types of marriage occur, whether the bride
relative is living or dead. Residence. Residence a 591
either duolocal or matrilocal under the roof of the
wife's mother until the birth of one or two children.
For a man married to a youngest daughter, a then
continues to be matrilocal. For men married to other
daughters, it becomes virilocal. There have also al-
ways been cases of virilocal residence, and it is now
common to find matrilocal residence in Shilling. For
non-Christian families, it is duolocal throughout the
marriage. Domestic unit. The domestic unit is the 592
elementary family, though for a youngest daughter
it may temporarily include also her aged mother,
aged father, unmarried siblings, or divorced or wid-
owed brothers. Inheritance. Traditionally, after the 428
Ghost mother had helped each of her daughters to
build and supply a house when each was married and
had children, her only chief obligation to help them
economically was ended. Everything she possessed,
excepting certain personal effects that were destroyed in
her cremation, was inherited by her youngest daugh-
ter. Failing daughters, a woman's property reverted
to her own youngest sister's daughter. Today, the [178]
pattern is often modified by getting more property
into the hands of older daughters and even sons.
Cf. Cantle 1956, Barker 1954. Divorce. A woman 586
may effect numerous and usually brief separations
from her husband by simply closing the door of her
house to him, whereupon he returns to the home of
his mother or youngest sister. Divorce, however, must
be initiated by mutual consent. Divorce is very com-
mon, even though women resist it because they do
not wish to lose a provider, and men because they
do not wish to lose their children. Formerly it was 586
accomplished by a simple ritual in the presence of 178
witnesses, followed by public announcement by a
town crier. Now, the witnesses and the public an-
nouncement have been dispensed with, and evidence
for divorce consists only in the word of the parties
concerned.

SOCIOPOLITICAL ORGANIZATION. Political or 62
association. The basic unit of political organization is
the village, which is composed of one or more domi-
nant local descent groups plus several others. Vil-
lage government is by an assembly of all resident
adult males, under the informal chairmanship of a
headman elected by them from among their number.
The membership of any immigrant household into a
village is subject to the participation of the house-
hold's males in this assembly. Sustained membership
in a village is voluntary. Ghost shrines probably 174
arose out of voluntary associations of villages which 819
eventually transferred allegiance from one chief to
another.

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another. In other words, a state is not a fixed territorial entity. In the early twentieth century, the most populous of the 25 chiefdoms, Khyrim, contained 30,533 persons occupying 7,800 houses in 372 villages, and the least populous, Nongkhrai, contained 248 persons occupying 53 houses in 3 villages. Fifteen of the chiefdoms were headed by a *syiem* (chief), three by a *lyngdoh* (priest), six by a *sirdar*, and one by a *wahadadar*. These leaders all had executive and judicial functions, but a chief's authority was limited in that he had to obtain the approval of his executive council before acting. The other leaders were subject to a similar limitation. A chief maintained a small police force. His major sources of revenue were market tolls, fines, and, more recently, income from licenses to distill rice whisky. Succession to a ruling role in the larger states traditionally involved election by members of a lineage that had a hereditary right to elect, from among members of a lineage that had the hereditary right to rule. In British times, the election basis was broadened, differentially in the various states, even to the point of popular elections. [Cf. Arthur 1935, Lyngdoh 1960.] Social stratification. The three classes of lineage are the nobles, the commoners, and the slaves or servants. This stratification applies only to the recruitment to office in the native-state system, for there is no hereditary caste and in a village assembly everyone has equal voice. The noble lineages have the hereditary right to fill from among their male members roles such as village or state priest, councilor to a chief, or elector of a chief. The few lineages which today are remembered as slave or servant lineages had the inherited obligation to render special services to a chief's household. There is no Khasi term for "commoners." Every lineage other than a noble or a slave lineage is a commoner lineage, and the commoner lineages are in the majority. Warfare. Warfare was suppressed by the British, and little is known for certain about its traditional forms. The tactics which confronted the British were the ambush and the guerrilla raid. Traditional goals included taking heads from other Khasis and capturing women from the valleys.

RELIGION. Major and indigenous religions. A Welsh Calvinistic Methodist missionary penetrated into Cherrapunji in 1832, and the work that he began continues to this day. His society, which has since become the Welsh Presbyterian Foreign Mission, introduced writing, village primary schools, a high school, a theological seminary, and a hospital. Competing missionaries followed, and by 1914 some thirty-four Khasis were presiding over the tenets and rituals of traditional Hinduism and Islam but also of the Buddhism, Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Unitarian (Rev. 1914). By the 1950s, conversion of the Church of God and the Seventh Day Adventists were

also active, and in that decade one U Kyrhai, a Khasi convert to Presbyterianism, left that church and founded a unique sect that blends something of himself with something of mystical Hinduism and Christianity. The competitors who most seriously threatened the dominance of the Welsh Presbyterians were the Roman Catholic missionaries who arrived in Shillong about 1860. Catholics have since opened a number of high schools, colleges, convents, and orphanages. They also established a technical school, and are now constructing a seminary. At the present time, one estimate is that there are about 100,000 Presbyterians and 90,000 Roman Catholics among Khasis. Members of other Christian sects are comparatively few; adherents to Hinduism and Islam are fewer still, comprised chiefly of Khasi women married to Hindu or Muslim men. U Kyrhai's sect is dying out, and the balance of Khasis are, according to their own term, "Khasi" in religion. [Cf. Lyngdoh 1937, Morris 1939, Bropmay 1940, Singh 1980, Pugh 1981.] Supernaturals. The great deities are two, an unnamed masculine God (U Blei) and an unnamed feminine Goddess (Ka Blei Nongsynshar Nongbakuna). God created the earth, and in the beginning instructed man in cultivation techniques and also laid down the framework of a moral order that should guide his every move if he wished to join God in heaven after death. This framework was then filled in by the first ancestors, who are therefore the authorities on the subject and are considered as Ka Iawbei (the mother), U Thawlang (the father), and U Suidkhu (the mother's brother). Very early, Goddess undertook to keep account of the numbers of human beings on earth, and this role was so important, relating as it did to the health and the multiplication of the people, that she became of major importance in the Khasi pantheon. When sin beset human society, God retrieved automatic punishments in the form of natural calamities, and man finally decided that one criminal should go and intercede with God on behalf of humans. The task went, agreed to take upon himself the burden of human sin, and received instructions in the correct divinatory and sacrificial techniques the which he would be one of the main objects of the knife. Again, over a period of time, it was the ancestors who perfected these techniques. Now, God is regarded as powerful and merciful, but passive. His punishments have their own impetus, and the expression of his mercy is solidified in ritual. Goddess is more vaguely conceived, but is much closer to the individual. [But cf. Ehrenfels 1950, who conceives of one double-sexed, great deity among Khasis.] Suggesting ancestors, it is never clear from prayers whether supplication is to generalized ancestors or to particular first ancestors of a Khasi's own matrilineage, and such a distinction seems not to matter. There are three other categories of minor deities: those who protect places (such as villages, groves, or springs),

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16: McCormack E-4,5 (1956-1958) 1964
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household deities, and ancestor and soulpen deities. Deities of the first two categories are simply aspects of the high God or Goddess. • The earth is peopled with two great orders of land demons and water demons who cause all undesirable, unnatural, and otherwise inexplicable events, acting either on their own or as instruments in the hands of sorcerers. Apart from omens, both in nature and in dreams, Khasis attach supernatural significance also to mystic numbers, and to the colors white, black, and red. They hold especially important folk beliefs regarding betel nut, paddy rice, gold and silver, and clothing. Practitioners. The two classes of religious practitioners are the village or state priests and the sacrificers. Both are male. They use the same divinatory technique of reading broken eggshells and the entrails of cocks, and they both sacrifice cocks, hens, goats, pigs, and cattle. Their skills are not taught to them so much as picked up by observation and confirmed by demonstrations of efficacy. A priest is elected from among the men of his clan to direct his skills to the public good until he dies, and his rewards are institutionalized and come from the village or the state. A sacrificer acts for private persons or his groups, we call, and is rewarded by them personally with gifts in cash or in kind. The sacrificer is called upon to explain and then to ritually remedy every variety of misfortune, especially illness, though his powers are nowadays regarded with ambivalence, and he is widely expected to become a sorcerer sooner or later. • There are two major types of sorcerer. One is the ritual specialist or sacrificer who secretly turns his skills from good to evil, manipulating demons to injure a person or his group, and acting always for himself alone out of considerations of jealousy or revenge. The other is usually a leading citizen, a woman who is an wealthy and successful that it is believed that she must keep a thief, i.e. a creature which will bring her prosperity so long as she feeds it periodically with human blood. To provide this blood, the men of her household, or other males whom she bewitches with a special whisky, will indiscriminately murder anyone except a member of her matrilineage. The latter have an analogue to the thief in their own, except that the ultimate result is death from illness rather than murder. Minor witchcraft can be perpetrated by person keepers or persons with an evil eye, who are often women. Ceremonies. The important traditional ceremonies were the life-crisis rituals relating to pregnancy and childbirth, the naming of a child, and death. Lesser ceremonies related to marriage and divorce, and to householding. All these rituals were addressed primarily to the ancestors, and they are still performed in modified form by many Khasis. Other rituals, which were performed by groups such as villages, clan, local descent groups, or households, were addressed to the ensouled aspects of the high

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God or Goddess, deities regarded as helpful in bringing prosperity, producing fertility, and so on. Rituals of this kind are no longer practiced, except for the Beduaghlam ceremony designed to protect the Jaintia village of Jowai. Finally, the state religion of many chiefdoms was expressed in one great ceremony per year which was intended to secure ancestral blessing for a chief and his lineage, and, through this, for the entire chiefdom. The notable example, still practiced, is the Pomblang Syiem of Khyrim chiefdom. [Cf. Lyngdoh 1937, 1946, Stoeguiller 1934b, Becker 1908.] **Illness and medicine.** In time of illness, a Khasi calls in a sacrificer, and possibly also a medicine man. The medicine man is an ordinary individual who has hit upon some herbal remedy for one or more ailments, who has become famous enough to be sought out and rewarded in cash, and who jealously guards the formula of his medicine until it dies with him. He and his patients tend to regard him as specially blessed. **Soul, death, and afterlife.** The universe is comprised of a heaven, the earth, and the air between. Heaven is where the souls of deceased mortals live in eternal peace, grouped ub by ub. The earth and all nature were created by God, and everything that God created has its own individual soul. There is no other great earth deity, for it was God who created the earth. The air is inhabited by the wandering souls of those dead for whom full death rites were not performed. A Khasi's potentiality for enjoying an afterlife in heaven with his ancestors depends on his receiving proper death rites at the hands of his ub mates. First, his body is cremated by his children, notably his youngest daughter, and his bones are collected and deposited temporarily in a small stone receptacle. All work stops in the village while everyone participates in the funeral. Once every several years, an entire ub gathers to witness the transfer of the bones of recently deceased ub mates from their temporary receptacles to the great ub cairn that is in the keeping of the youngest daughter, descended from the ub ancestress through a line of youngest daughters. This final ceremony covers five days, and is elaborate and expensive, but when an individual's bones are finally resting with those of his antecedents in the cairn, it is understood that his soul is finally in heaven, "resting level out in the house of God."

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